



Town of Groton, Connecticut

Meeting Minutes

Town Council Committee of the Whole

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Mayor Harry A. Watson, Councilors Peter J. Bartinik, Jr., Heather Sherman Bond, Catherine Kolnaski, Frank O'Beirne, Jr., John F. Scott, Paulann H. Sheets, James L. Streeter, and Elissa T. Wright.

Tuesday, December 12, 2006

6:00 PM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1

SPECIAL MEETING

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Watson called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Members Present: Mayor Watson, Councilor Bond, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., Councilor Sheets and Councilor Streeter

Members Absent: Councilor Bartinik, Jr., Councilor Scott and Councilor Wright

Also present were Town Manager Mark Oefinger, Assistant to the Town Manager Lee Vincent and Executive Assistant Nicki Bresnayan.

3. Calendar and Communications

Mayor Watson asked if the Council would like to conduct a pre-budget public hearing in late January or early February, and the consensus was yes. It was also decided to cancel the January 2, 2007 Town Council meeting.

4. Approval of Minutes

2006-0283 Approval of Minutes (Committee of the Whole)

RESOLUTION ACCEPTING COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MINUTES

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the Town Council Committee of the Whole of October 24, 2006, November 14, 2006, and November 28, 2006 are hereby accepted and approved.

Tabled

5. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None

6. NEW BUSINESS

2006-0306 GMEA/CILU Pension Agreement

A motion was made by Councilor Bond, seconded by Councilor Streeter, to enter executive session at 6:07 p.m. to consider 2006-0306 GMEA/CILU Pension Agreement, and to invite the Town Manager, Town Attorney Eileen Duggan, Joyce Sauchuk, and Doug Ackerman to attend.

The motion carried unanimously

2006-0306 GMEA/CILU Pension Agreement

Discussed

The executive session concluded at 7:36 p.m.

2006-0306 GMEA/CILU Pension Agreement

A motion was made by Councilor Bond, seconded by Councilor Kolnaski, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously

2006-0295

Overview of Town Departments**Discussed**

Chief Kelly Fogg provided an overview of the Police Department. Personnel changes include 22 retirements in the last five years, with the positions averaging 27 years of service. Many supervisors have retired and the department is down about 50% in its supervisory ranks. Promotional exams were recently held for three lieutenants and four sergeants. Chief Fogg noted it has been difficult to keep up with hiring, as the region is competing for a smaller pool of candidates. The department is down five officer positions, which are filled with overtime as necessary. By June, 50% of the department's officers will have less than three years of experience making supervisors very important. The primary purpose for police staff is to patrol. Vacancies have been addressed with overtime, but there has been a shift in the workplace environment and officers no longer want to work overtime shifts creating staffing problems.

Community policing continues to work well. Web sites have been established for the Poquonnock Bridge Neighborhood Association and the Maritime Academy. The Drug Task Force is also doing well with numerous arrests made. Chief Fogg noted that these are time consuming and detailed investigations. The Town and City of Groton were recently joined by Stonington in this effort. Motor vehicle complaints continue to be the number one issue for patrol, however the department can no longer focus on areas due to the elimination of the motor vehicle enforcement team.

The Department is having difficulty with the records management system purchased in 2000 and implemented in 2005. The system is inadequate, does not function properly, does not generate reports or provide the ability to analyze. It is difficult to extract information and often the information is inaccurate. This has created a records backlog. Also, the system can not be used with the mobile data terminals.

There has been a recent increase in violent crimes in Groton. It is too early to tell if this is a trend. However, a community the size of Groton should have an emergency response team, especially in a place with numerous homeland security targets. Such a team requires a higher level of tactical training.

There has also been an increase in fraud and computer crimes. These are time consuming investigations and are usually multi-jurisdictional. Special training is needed to investigate these cases. Seniors are often the targets of these scams. The Department is currently developing a public information video on this subject.

Chief Fogg noted that through grants and asset forfeiture, the department has been able to purchase nine mobile data terminals, a camera for the Automated Fingerprint Identification System, and two canines.

Building needs include renovations of the detective division which is unchanged since 1977, the booking area, and the cell holding area which is creating liability and segregation issues. Chief Fogg offered to conduct tours of the station for the Council.

Doug Ackerman, Director of Administrative Services, noted the records management software was part of the consolidated dispatch center and it is not performing to specifications. He is preparing a CIP project to address the issue. The Town has attempted to work with the vendor.

Discussion followed on the cost to train officers for an Emergency Response Team and the availability of Homeland Security grants. Chief Fogg described the requirements and process to become a police officer. Discussion followed on the increase in violent crimes in the region. Chief Fogg noted that the former Emergency Response Team was comprised of Town of Groton officers, but the services were offered to the City and Groton Long Point. Discussion followed on

canine training. Councilor Streeter suggested using the State Police for canine training and Chief Fogg noted that the State Police will not do narcotics training.

Councilor Wright arrived at 7:20 p.m.

Councilor Bond asked Chief Fogg his opinion on classifying 16 and 17 year olds as juveniles. Chief Fogg stated that he feels there is something in between juvenile and adult, but the separation issue will affect all departments and will cost a lot of money.

The Council asked that the next presentation be made by the Library.

Roll Call: Members Present: Mayor Watson, Councilor Bond, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., Councilor Sheets, Councilor Streeter and Councilor Wright
Members Absent: Councilor Bartinik, Jr. and Councilor Scott

2005-0209 Water Pollution Control Facility Expansion

Discussed

Director of Public Works Gary Schneider noted that the Town received five bids on the Water Pollution Control Facility Upgrade and at least two bids are within budget. Staff and the consultant need to review the bids, the numbers and qualifications.

2006-0102 Fort Hill Sewer Project Update

Discussed

Director of Public Works Gary Schneider noted that the Town is working on requests for easements for laterals to be mailed in December and January to homeowners. The project is at the 75% design level. Mr. Schneider reviewed bid and construction date estimates, with construction estimated to start in May 2007.

2006-0168 Ledyard's Request for Sewer Service

Discussed

Mr. Schneider noted that the WPCA has not met to discuss this issue. Also, staff has not been able to meet with Ledyard's Director of Planning.

2006-0298 Steamboat Wharf Dredging Request

Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger noted that Steamboat Wharf Condominium owners were present to address the request. Marshall Yudin, president, and Kurt Stohm, owner, would like the lagoon at Steamboat Wharf dredged. The last dredgings occurred in 1999 and 1992; prior to that, the lagoon was dredged every two years by DOT. Town Manager Oefinger explained that at the time of the last dredging, the Town secured the permit and turned it over to DOT, which hired an outside firm. The Town also provided a place for the dredge materials, at a tremendous cost savings. Now there is a desire to find a long term solution. Although there has been a series of discussions between Steamboat Wharf, DOT and DEP over the years, no one has identified a plan or who would pay. The Town Manager reminded the Council that the Town approved \$20,000 for the project. Initial attempts by the Town to remove the material by vacuuming were unsuccessful. A private contractor with a stronger vacuum had more success, but they could not reach the outer area of the plume. The Town has continued discussions with DOT regarding providing separators in the drainage system in Water Street, but the drainage system is being designed to meet a budget number, not to provide a long term solution.

Mr. Yudin noted the condominium owners committed to rebuilding the bulkheads and docks once dredged which is a large investment.

Discussion followed on the drainage pipe and the upland drainage area.

Town Manager Oefinger noted that dredging will be significantly more expensive this time because of disposal costs. This is a policy issue for the Town Council. The Town Manager feels that there should be a partnership between the three entities. If the Council decides to proceed, there would be a CIP project prepared. Discussion followed on the status of the dredging permit.

Councilor O'Beirne expressed concern that the cost of the solution is shifting to the Town. He suggested that the Town put pressure on DOT to fix the problem. He supports the Town helping with the permitting, but not scheduling the project in the CIP.

Councilor Sheets asked if Public Works could reduce sanding on surfaces contributing to the plume. Town Manager Oefinger noted that the Town has made progress in that area, but sand is still the preferred way of providing traction on hills so it can not be eliminated entirely.

Mayor Watson suggested that the Town has tried to help in this situation, but it is really DOT's problem and a meeting should be forced. Councilor Sheets suggested notifying the Governor of DOT's resistance. Mayor Watson noted he would work with the Town Manager to set up a meeting.

The Committee recessed for 10 minutes.

2006-0213**Lighting on Riverview Avenue, Noank****Discussed**

Director of Public Works Gary Schneider noted that the Town owns the street lights and poles in this area. CL&P is responsible for connecting the light to the power system. One light has been fixed. One pole will be reinstalled (the Town is waiting for a price estimates). The metal pole has no power and the Town has had no success getting the work done. There is a fourth pole and wiring that were installed by an unknown entity. The Town is getting a price on replacing the pole and installing it correctly. The Town has made numerous service calls to CL&P. Councilor Sheets suggested that the Town could file a complaint with DPUC. Mr. Schneider stated that he would prefer to make more phone calls first. He also noted that the Town is using the most effective, cost efficient lighting (high pressure sodium) at low wattage.

2006-0195**Citizen Committee on Property Tax Relief****Recommended for a Resolution**

Town Manager Oefinger provided a brief history on this referral, noting the parameters developed by Councilor Bond. Councilor Bond reviewed the options for the Town and the guidelines that she developed as a starting point.

Councilor O'Beirne expressed a number of objections to this type of program citing concerns with lost tax revenue, existing programs, income limits, length of residency, and length of time that a property's taxes could be frozen. Councilor Bond responded to the objections.

Councilor Sheets expressed support for the proposal. Mayor Watson noted that the Committee would be set up by the Town Manager and would have 60 days to report to the Town Council.

Councilor Wright expressed support for this proposal noting that a previous Council passed a similar resolution, but the Committee was never set up.

Discussion followed.

2006-0195**Citizen Committee on Property Tax Relief**

A motion was made by Councilor Bond, seconded by Councilor Sheets, to recommend a resolution establishing a Citizen Committee on Property Tax Relief.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Votes: In Favor: 4 - Councilor Bond, Councilor Sheets, Councilor Streeter and Councilor Wright
Opposed: 2 - Mayor Watson and Councilor O'Beirne, Jr.
Abstain: 1 - Councilor Kolnaski

2006-0166 Governor's Economic Diversification Commission

Discussed

Mayor Watson noted that the group met this morning and received the draft report. There were some minor changes. The final report is due to the Governor by Friday. Town Manager Oefinger directed Councilors to the summary of recommendations in the report. He offered to provide a more in-depth review if desired by the Council. Councilor Bond noted that extension of utilities on Flanders Road is included in the recommendations.

Councilor Sheets noted she would like to talk about potential uses for the Norwich Hospital site including inventions, research and development, and incubators and next generation businesses.

2006-0239 Animal Shelter

Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger provided a brief update on this issue. A meeting was held with a number of other towns in the region and the Humane Society. The Executive Director will be making a presentation to the Board of Directors on December 19th and asking for permission to do a needs assessment. The Town has made a non-binding commitment, and is in fact exploring both the Town and regional options.

Also, staff met with Scott Learned who does a lot of work with animal shelters. Town Manager Oefinger reviewed Mr. Learned's qualifications and expertise. Mr. Learned verified the costs that the Town is coming up with. He also offered to come talk to the Town Council if helpful.

2006-0297 Town Clerk Compensation

Discussed

Mayor Watson noted that pertinent information was mailed to Councilors by Barbara Tarbox. Discussion followed on entering executive session and what form the evaluation would take. Mayor Watson asked the Town Clerk to send an evaluation form to Councilors and he asked that evaluation forms be returned to him by December 31st.

7. Consideration of Committee Referral Items as per Town Council Referral List

None.

8. OTHER BUSINESS

Town Manager Oefinger asked for a referral on the request for a fence at Tanglewood Park and Mayor Watson made the referral to the Environment and Recreation Committee.

Councilor O'Beirne requested a referral on Charter Revision, and Mayor Watson made the referral to the Committee of the Whole.

Mayor Watson asked staff to set up a meeting with the Board of Education regarding the budget.

9. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Councilor Kolnaski, seconded by Councilor Streeter, to adjourn the meeting at 9:31 p.m.